Studies on Teaching Strategies for Italian Grade Test: Taking the Writing Part as an Example

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Abstract

This article has first introduced that Italian preparatory course training should be with language test as the teaching baton based on current overseas study data and policies. Targeting at the writing part in grade test, the author has collected and organized for 90 students' writing paper, and analyzed students' mistakes, pointed out the mistake reasons, and meanwhile revealed the influence of language negative transfer on students. The author has suggested that "metacognitive strategy" should be introduced into writing teaching, and proposed relevant teaching strategies.

Key words: Italian grade test; Italian training; Writing; Teaching strategy; Italian B1 level

INTRODUCTION

On July 4th, China and the Government of the Republic of Italy agreement on mutual recognition of higher education degrees, which opened up the door for Chinese students to study in Italy. Except for traditional international student programs, Italian colleges have customized "Marco Polo Program" and "Turandot Program" only for Chinese students. In 2012, Executive Programmed of Scientific and Technological Cooperation between Italy and China for the years 2012-2015 was signed by both countries to lay solid foundation for all-out development of higher education and teaching cooperation field of China and Italy.

Italy has become one of the hottest destination for Chinese students' overseas study with its public education with free tuition, long-standing humanity history, world-leading academic specialty, free registration, low admission threshold, low cost of living index, legal part-time-work and part-time-study, world renowned art academies, acceptance of skilled migration, and other advantages.

In October 2017, Education Section Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Italy issued the latest statistical data of studying in Italy:

Table 1
The Number of Pre Registered Students in the Last Ten Years

Year	The number of pre registered Chinesestudents	Turandot program	Programma marco polo	International students
2008	1,136	0	766	370
2009	1,640	130	969	541
2010	2,110	447	991	991
2011	2,679	743	994	672
2012	3,518	1,327	1,152	942
2013	3,699	1,428	887	1,274
2014	3,762	1,522	943	1,251
2015	4,138	1,652	984	1,502
2016	4,401	1,970	1,003	1,426
2017	4,166	1,530	992	1,714

It can be seen from the form that the number of Chinese students' pre-registration for studying in Italy has increased year by year but 2017 witnessed a decrease for the first time in a few number. But according to new policy on studying in Italy issued by Italian government in 2017, students must take Italian grade test after

completing Italian preparatory course training and get admitted after achieving B1 level. The new policy aiming at improving admission threshold has greatly impacted the overall number of students studying in Italy.

Meanwhile, as required by Italian Ministry of Education, from 2017 Chinese students must take language preparatory course training for at least ten months in Italy and the time of language training before going aboard has been reduced from 12 months to 3 months. In front of new situation and new policies, it is necessary to explore new theories and practice as Italian self-funded study preparatory course training is up against new challenges now.

The essential condition of getting admitted to Italian colleges is: Students pass Italian grade test and obtain at least B1 certificate (exam includes listening, reading, grammatical structural analysis, writing and oral speaking). Language learning and testing supplement each other. On one hand, language testing can test students' language learning effect and on the other hand, language learning has limited and influenced the content and form of language testing. Language training for learners to obtain language certificate difference with general language teaching should be with language testing as the baton of teaching.

1. ITALIAN GRADE TEST

There are four types of Italian grade test with same validity:

a) CELI language grade test: the test is organized by CELI granted with Italian proficiency certificate;

b) CILS: the test is organized by CILS granted with Italian proficiency certificate;

c) IT: the test is organized by IT with Italian proficiency certificate;

d) PLIDA: the test is organized by PLIDA granted with Italian proficiency certificate.

Although four test names and organization units are different, exam and authentication are subject to "A Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning, Teaching and Assessment" (hereinafter referred to as CEFR). CEFR is a common reference basis in the whole Europe and the guideline for each country to compile foreign language teaching program and exam program. CEFR categorizes language proficiency into following six grades:

Table 2
Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Level group	Level group name	Level	Level name	Description
A	Basic user	A1	Breakthrough or beginner	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people they know and things they have. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
		A2	Waystage or elementary	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of their background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
B	Independent user	B1	Threshold or intermediate	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
		B2	Vantage or upper intermediate	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

To be continued

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Level group	Level group name	Level	Level name	Description
C	Proficient user	C1	Effective operational proficiency or advanced	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer clauses, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express ideas fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
		C2	Mastery or proficiency	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express themselves spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in the most complex situations.

This article has analyzed the exam requirements and students' mistakes for the writing part of B1 test, and discussed the writing teaching strategies of Italian language preparatory course training based on this.

2. ANALYSIS ON STUDENTS' MISTAKES IN WRITING EXAM

With a set of writing test with CELI B1 level with the quiz, the author has tested 90 college students and set the 90 articles as the object of research, and then analyzed and classified students' composition mistakes from three aspects, vocabulary, syntax and textual cohesion.

2.1 CELI Test Analysis

Language activities are carried out in certain field. CEFR categorizes fields related to foreign language learning into four aspects. But the scope of question setting in each grade will inevitably involve following domains:

a) Public domain: all day social contact including business or civil relation, public service sector, cultural and entertainment activities in public sites, and relations with news media;

b) Workplace domain: occasions related to communicators' occupation;

c) Education domain: It usually refers to formal schools and training organization which are regarded for imparting knowledge and specific skills;

d) Individual domain: communicators' family relation and personal social activity domain.

2.2 Analysis on Students' Writing Condition

Among 90 articles of students collected and organized by the author, there are 396 mistakes, including 231 morphology mistakes, 165 syntax errors. The author has generally categorized mistakes into following based on word characteristic.

Table 3
Errors Related to Speech

Word characteristic	Obvious mistake	Mistake examples
Noun	Poor mastery of property and number of non, especially special nouns	For example: la gente written as il gente
Article	Poor mastery of special usage of articles	For example: una mia amica writeen as un' mia amica
Adjective	Inconformity of property and number of adjective and the modifying nouns	For example: Milano non è piccola. Instead of Milano non è piccolo as Milano is a feminine non as city although ended with an "o"
Preposition	Unskilled in set structures	For example: Sono andato a teatro. Instead of Sono andato in teatro
Verb	Unskilled conjugation especially irregular verb	For example: Verrai instead of Venirai
Pronoun	Confusion of form and usage of direct pronouns, indirect pronouns and combined pronouns especially in imperative mood.	For example: Dimmelo instead of dimilo

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[2] The Ministry of Education. (2003). English Curricular Standard for Common Senior Middle School.
[3] The Ministry of Education (2010). *Testing Syllabus for Senior High School Students*. Retrieved from http://club.topsage.com / thread-497623-1-1.html

Now give following examples:

a) Subject-verb disagreement

Incorrec: Mi sono piaciuto molto lo spettacolo.

Correct: Mi è piaciuto molto lo spettacolo.

Error cause: the subject of this sentence if lo spettacolo.

b) Misuse of parts of speech

Incorrect: Ho mangiato buono.

Correct: Ho mangiato bene.

Erro cause: Here adverb bene is required to modify the verb maniare intead of adjective buono.

c) Misplaced modifiers

Incorrect: Sono un uomo povero.

Correct: Sono un povero uomo

Error cause: The adj proverro should be placed before the noun meaning "pathetic" but meaning "badly off" if putting behind a noun. The students wants to express pathetic, so it should be in front of the noun.

d) Run-on sentence lacks a conj.

Incorrect: La settimana scorsa ho assistito ad uno spettacolo al Teatro alla Scala di Milano, mi è piaciuto molto.

Correct: La settimana scorsa ho assistito ad uno spettacolo al Teatro alla Scala di Milano e mi è piaciuto molto.

Error cause: There is no conj between two sub-clauses.

e) Mechanical appliation of Chinese thinking strucure

Incorrect: Nel teatro aveva molte persone.

Correct: C'erano molte persone nel teatro.

Error cause: Influenced by Chinese thinking, the student should use "esserci" setence pattern to present "there are a lot of people" int the theatre but should not machanically use "avere" to express "have".

Generalized utilization of definite subordinate clause

Incorrect: Mentre guido la macchina ascolto la musica.

Correct: Guido la macchina ascoltando la musica.

Error cause: If main clause and sub-clause have the same subject, try to use uncertain subordinate clause instead of definite clause. In this sentence, the subject of "drive car" and "listen to the music" are "me", so use adverbial verb and avoid definite clause.

Word order error

Incorrect: Ne parliamo chiaramente è importante.

Correct: È importante che ne parliamo chiaramente.

Error cause: The student tries to express "it is important to discuss this thing clearly". But in Italy, this is an impersonal sentence. To avoid front heaviness, we need to put back the subject clause derived by "che".

tense error

Incorrect: Ieri sono invitato da Paolo.

Correct: Ieri sono stato invitato da Paolo.

Error cause: "ieri" means "yesterday". As a time maker, it decides that the "be invited" should use passato prossimo of passive but "sono invitato" is simple present tense of passive.

3. ERROR ANALYSIS AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Based on students' common errors in the writing part of Italian grade tests, the author has summarized languages as follows.

3.1 Mother Language Interference and Coping Strategies

Influenced by negative transfer of Chinese, generalization of Chinese thinking has resulted in a lot of syntactic structure problems, mechanical word creation and unidiomatic, non-standard expression. Rod Ellis once pointed out that language transfer refers to the phenomenon that learner's existing language (mother language) knowledge influences the second language (foreign language) acquisition and development (Ellis, 1985). Odlin points out, influenced by the similarities of mother langue and target langue, correct output during target langauge study is called positive transfer. On the contrary, influenced by the difference of mother langue and target langue, incorrect output during target langauge study is called negative transfer (Odlin, 1989). Positive transfer refers to borrowing some forms of mother language under the influence of mother langue unknowingly in a foreign language environment. The reuslt of the habit of borrowing foreing languages is correct. Opposte to negative transfer, the form of borrowing mother language does not conform to the convneiton in foreign language or cannot be accepted by the native people. Negative transfer would result in language mistakes and learning disability. Negative transfer as an interference factor will bring difficulties to learners and it is a source of causing language bias error. So we need to pay more attention to promoting positive transfer, prohibiting negative transfer and promoting new concept internalization, by fulling using network multi-media and diversified writing and correction methods to achieve the goal that both teachers and students attach importance to writing skills and active participate into writing, gradually eliminate the influence of mother language negative transfer on English writing (Li, 2013).

3.2 Lack of Basic Language Knowledge and Coping Strategies

Considering that the teaching of Italian grade test is different with ordinary Italian undergraduate teaching, and different with language training before going to Italy for living, travelling and working. It has clear purpose to get students to understand and master test knowledge points within a limited time and passing exam through certain test skills to obtain certificate. But there are no special and systematic teaching materials for Italian grade test, which requires us to adapt teaching materials based on original textbook during teaching to establish a systematic material database for Italian grade test teaching.

During teaching practice, the author has integrated and adjusted grammar teaching of writing based on analyzing grade test requirements and previous test paper according to the basic characteristics of Italian grammar and students' learning characteristics. For example, when instructing how to use verbs in writing, considering grade test difficulty, students' fallible points and structure complication degree, it is necessary to start from the simple tense of various verbs including special verbs (such as -rsi verb), and transit to the compound tense of various verbs, and finally combine with the fallible points in writing to emphatically instruct and practice the special usages of verbs by topic.

3.3 Lack of Purposeful Practice and Coping Strategies

The emphasis of testing "listening, speaking, reading and writing" are different. "Writing" is an important way of way output. Considering students are zero based, the language environment of Italian is not as favorable as English. During writing teaching, teachers can combine writing with any other course type. For example, combine writing class with comprehensive class or grammar class, and use text retelling or adaptation to improve language quality, use question type training to penetrate writing skills, integrate grammar learning contents with writing training to solve students' problems in vocabulary, grammar, textual cohesion and other basic skills.

For common question types in grade test, teachers should strengthen writing, prepare abundant example articles and cases for students' imitation, reciting, adaptation and continuation. Also, timely to summarize and analyze students' error causes and require students to expand writing contents and length based on mistake correction. "Student-student mutual evaluation" method can be used. Ask students to modify compositions and propose modification suggestions to strengthen their vigilant awareness of common mistakes. Ask students to collect nice sentences and articles and make into volumes for mutual borrowing and comments so as to mobilize students' activity of composition writing.

3.4 Lack of Effective Test-Taking Strategies and Coping Strategies

For this teaching practice, the author has analyzed the skills of question answering and test taking for this set of test paper.

Short sentences and non-verb sentences.

For example, come è venuto a conoscenza (how do you know), use prep to answer directly such as Da un amico; Dal giornale.

Use Con il treno, con l'autobus to answer "Con queli mezzi di trasporto" (What form of transport do you use?)

For example, answer: Consiglierebbe...? (What's you suggestion?)

Answer directly: Sì. And avoid using verbs so as to avoid unfamiliar conjugation to cause mistakes.

In B2 part, an email is required with great attention to the format. For the application type article, the author suggests students can recite some model essays and commonly used sentences and pay attention to the word amount which cannot be less than the requirement but not exceed too much.

In B3 part, the word count requirement is 90-100 words. It is usually an email replying a friend or to tell your friend one of your experience. Students are required to write about people they met, interesting things, and their feelings. The author requires students to pay attention to the article tense. Past tense is usually used. Present tense and future tense can be used at last for outlook and summary.

For example, the writing part in this test mentioned following information:

a)   Your feelings after watching the performance in Teatro alla Scala.
b)   Artists you met
c)   Invite your friends

Please be noted that this is a letter to friend. Greetings are required at the beginning and invitation is often used at last as ending.

To sum up, students should pay attention to question requirement and word count, especially to write down required information in the article. Set the target information as the mainline of the composition conception, and develop based on this.

3.5 Introduce Metacognition Concept Into Writing Teaching

The concept of Metacognition was proposed by US psychologist J. H. Havell based on metamemory. He defined it as the cognition of cognition when using the concept in 1976, i.e. learners set their own cognition system as the object of cognition for self-awareness, self-control, self-assessment and adjustment on the cognition process. To help people know more about Metacognition, in 1977, Flavell and Wellman defined the content of Metacognition, i.e. metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience and metacognitive monitoring. They think individuals can present their ability of cognitive control through the effect or mutual effect of these three aspects (Lei, 2008).

Use metacognitive strategy to cultivate students' self-monitoring ability of the study process to help students effectively organize learning activities (Du, 2004), reasonably plan, arrange, monitor, adjust and evaluate learning tasks (Fang, 2003). In other words, during writing teaching, teachers should teach students to write and also cultivate their ability of independent learning.

Cultivating independent learner is an important symbol of successful education. The final purpose of education is to help students establish personalized learning methods

and own autonomous learning ability. This requires teachers to pay attention to cultivate students' learning motivation and confidence, improve the comprehensive quality, which is also the core issue for metacognition theory research (Yang, 2008).

In specific teaching, students should know their tasks, make plan and prepare for learning condition before learning activities so that they can maintain interest and passion for strategy learning. During learning, they should know the process, characteristics, and their writing ability and improve, writing and cognitive strategy of improving English level. To strengthen the monitoring on learning process, combine three scoring methods, self-assessment, student evaluation and teacher evaluation so as to help students to know their current level and correct and adjust their cognitive strategy timely (Fang, 2003).

CONCLUSION

In domestic and foreign language teaching domain, speaking and listening are attracting more attention. Particularly in China, students are troubled by dummy English. So oral communicative competence cultivation is set as a teaching method to adapt to teaching reform trend. But the tide of hypercorrectness has resulted in a situation of "emphasizing speaking than writing". Regarding language training for Italian grade test, we should attach equal importance to "listening, speaking reading and writing". Under the guidance of new teaching concept, use new teaching methods to complete new teaching tasks. Especially for writing part that Chinese students are poor at, we should strengthen teaching instruction and practice, increase the proportion of writing skill and expertise lecturing so as to eliminate students' fear of difficulty and help students to achieve optimal learning and test-taking effect within limited time.

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APPENDIX:AN EXAMPLE OF WRITING EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

B1. Lei ha soggiornato alcuni giorni in Italia e ha visitato un importante Parco Nazionale in montagna. Al termine della visita un impiegato dell'Ufficio per il Turismo del Parco Le chiede di rispondere al seguente questionario. Lei accetta.

1. Come è venuto a conoscenza del Parco?
2. Per quali motivi ha deciso di visitare il Parco?
3. Con chi lo ha visitato?
4. Quali mezzi di trasporto ha utilizzato per raggiungere il Paroco?
5. Cosa Le è piaciuto di più all'interno del Parco?
6. Cosa pensa delle attività sportive organizzate nel Parco?
7. Come giudica le guide turistiche che ci lavorano?
8. Consiglierebbe di visitare il Parco ad un Suo amico? Perché?
9. In futuro pensa di visitare il Parco un'altra volta? Perché?

B.2 Rispondere ad un annuncio.
Scrivere nello spazio riservato a B.2 nel Foglio delle Risposte. (Usare circa 50 parole)

Lei abita da qualche mese a Roma per motivi di lavoro e ha bisogno di comprare un'automobile per spostarsi in città. Ha trovato un annuncio interessante su Internet e ha deciso di rispondere.

Sono Giovanni, vendo un'auto usata, comprata solo due anni fa, di piccole dimensioni, adatta a muoversi in città. Per maggiori informazioni scrivetemi a questo indirizzo e-mail: giovanni@...

Nella risposta Lei
1. si presenta brevemente e spiega perché è interessato a questo annucio.
2. chiede il prezzo della macchina e quando potrebbe vederla
3. dà indicazioni su come comtattarla

B.3 Scrivere una e-mail.
Scrivere nello spazio riservato a B.3 nel Foglio delle risposte.
(Da un minimo di 90 ad un massimo di 100 parole)
Lei ha assistito ad uno straordinario spettacolo al Teatro della Scala di Milano, un importante teatro italiano.Dopo lo spettacolo ha potuto parlare con alcuni artisti e ha fatto delle foto con loro.
Decide di raccontare questa bella esperienza ad un Suo amico italiano e gli scrive una e-mail.
Nella e-mail:
1. gli racconta dello spettacolo e gli descrive le emozioni che ha provato
2. gli parla degli artisti che ha conosciuto
3. invita l'amico ad andare a vedere con Lei il prossimo spettacolo